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# THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

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## PHENOMENA OF THE HEAVEN IN THE ODYSSEY

Miss Jane Harrison, in *The Year's Work in Classical Studies*, for 1915, page 76, enthusiastically endorses a statement of Professor Grace Harriet Macurdy, of Vassar College, in *The Classical Quarterly* 8.213, that the

*Odyssey* differs from the *Iliad* not only in knowing Zeus less in his aspect of sky—that is aether—God, but in its lack of sensibility to all the phenomena of the heaven. 'Fire and hail, snow and vapours, wind and storm fulfilling his word'.

But there is no lack of sensibility to all the phenomena of the heaven in the *Odyssey*. That poem in fact abounds in perception of such phenomena. It mentions cloud or mist, wind, lightning, thunder, (or 'thunderer' sometimes), rain, snow, storm, frost, the Dawn, Sun, Moon, the stars, the firmament in its external sense (apart from specific mention of the stars) not less, I count, than 287 times<sup>1</sup>. Surely no lack of sensibility to the heaven!

The following figures are substantially accurate as to the number of times allusions to these various phenomena occur in the *Odyssey*. Cloud or mist, wind, lightning (both from clouds and from clear sky), thunder (or 'thunderer' sometimes), rain, tempest and clear sky are directly associated with Zeus about 56 times. The number of allusions is as follows: Zeus in relation to cloud or mist 16, wind 8, lightning 9, thunder (or 'thunderer' sometimes) 18, rain 3, tempest 1, and clear sky 1. Directly associated with Poseidon we have cloud once, the wind twice and the storm once. The wind is directly associated with Athene at least four times, with 'some angry god' once (19.201), with 'the gods' once (4.520), with Circe twice, with Calypso once, and with Aeolus more than once. Atlas upholds the pillars separating earth and sky.

Again, cloud or mist, wind or storm (sometimes 'the spirits of the storm'), frost, dew, rain and snow, not associated with any god, are mentioned not less than 76 times. The Dawn<sup>2</sup> (Eos, as goddess of the morn) is spoken of about 51 times, and each time is invested with ethereal beauty. What more gorgeous trait of heavenly phenomena than Homer's 'golden-throned', 'rosy-fingered', 'fair-tressed' dawn!

<sup>1</sup>This total, however, includes some repetition.

<sup>2</sup>I exclude several references to the dawn, and a few allusions to the 'dawning'.

The Sun, including Helios Hyperion as a luminary only, appears about 50 times, the Moon about 8 times, the stars or starry sky about 11 times. The firmament (I include in the term, for instance, 'wide-heaven', 'sky', 'heaven', etc., all in an external sense and exclusive of specific references to the stars and to 'the starry sky') is mentioned about 20 times. Not included in any of the foregoing references is the fact that the *Odyssey* repeatedly names Zeus as the author of the days, the nights, and the seasons. Furthermore, the poem repeatedly alludes to 'the immortal night', 'the divine night', 'the sacred day'.

Homer's Zeus in the *Odyssey* stirs us, as only Homer can, with the dazzling flashes of the lightning, the peal upon peal of the thunder, the awful majesty of the storm.

The real prominence of sensibility to all the phenomena of the heaven in the *Odyssey* will be better appreciated if that poem is compared with the works of Sophocles. The *Odyssey* comprises 12,120 lines, the extant works of Sophocles about 10,341 lines (this, however, is not the exact relation between the two in the extent of matter, owing to the difference in spacing between epic and dramatic poetry). As we have noted, the total number of references in the former to the phenomena stated is at least 287, whereas the total number of such references in Sophocles does not exceed about 100! But Sophocles cannot be justly considered to be lacking in sensibility to the phenomena of the heaven; far from it.

Professor Macurdy correctly observes that there are more allusions to such phenomena in the *Iliad* than in the *Odyssey*, but she fails to appreciate that this difference, rightly viewed, implies no plurality of authors. It simply signifies a difference in theme and scope between the two poems.

Professor John A. Scott, with his characteristic penetration, in *The Classical Journal* 12.145-146, in reference to Professor Macurdy's statement unanswerably points out that the greater extent of open air life in the *Iliad* rendered observations of the heavens more natural and more frequent than in the *Odyssey*. Furthermore, I think, the *Iliad* was composed when the immortal poet's fire of imagination was all aglow, while the charm of the *Odyssey* was produced in the evening of his life.

The marvelous consistency in these numerous allusions to heavenly phenomena which characterizes

both the Homeric poems is but one of the many links in the invulnerable chain of proof of the artistic unity of each poem. This is true not only in the relation of each poem to itself but in its relation to the other. This artistic unity is the certain stamp of a single, supreme, genius.

Critical legerdemain with reference to Homer has had its day. Future scholarship in general will be astonished (as much of present scholarship already is) at the influence F. A. Wolf had on the learned world for rather more than a century.

What has become of the doctrines of the Peisistratean theory, Athenian Interpolations, Solar Myths, Expurgations, Traditions (to name but a few)? They have returned to the aether whence they came; see some comparatively recent and unanswerable criticisms along these lines, such as those of John A. Scott in *Classical Philology* 6.419 ff. and 9.395 ff., and in *The Classical Journal* 12.119 ff.; that of Andrew Lang in Appendix B to his book *The World of Homer*; also Dr. Leaf's *Homer and History*, 310, though of course Dr. Leaf is a Separatist (no sentiment not directly quoted or cited should be imputed to any modern authority referred to in this article).

That celebrated Homerist, Friedrich Blass, declares (*Die Interpolationen in der Odyssee*, 12, published in 1904) that the difficulty of conceiving a single Homer author of both poems decreases as our knowledge of antiquity increases. And much progress has been made since even Blass's time. The brilliant J. W. Mackail of Oxford (an Homeric Unitarian) says (*Lectures on Greek Poetry*, 3, published 1911):

During the last generation our knowledge of the ancient world, our methods of investigation, our armament of criticism, have all undergone immense expansion.

As is well known, the stream of reaction against Separatist Criticism flows broad and strong; recall Professor Shewan's highly impressive presentation of authorities in his article, *Recent Homeric Literature*, in *Classical Philology* 7.190 ff.

Why do not the Separatists refute Andrew Lang and Karl Rothe after a lapse of about ten years? Simply because those epoch-making authorities regarding Homer are irrefutable.

There will be generally restored that Homer whose personality was not doubted by the world's two greatest original thinkers, Plato and Aristotle. Their acceptance of that personality—thousands of years nearer the Homeric Age than our time—is a fact of immense import and one to which due weight has not been accorded by modern critics.

One of the three or four foremost of modern intellects, far ahead of his time, answered the Wolfian school nearly a hundred years ago; Goethe, whose genius penetrated the grey mists of Ages, in his final words regarding Homer observed:

Behind these poems there stands a splendid unity—a single, lofty, creative mind.

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON.

C. A. MAURY.

## BRUTUS AND THE SHIPS OF THE VENETI

In *De Bello Gallico* 3 Caesar describes the ships of the Veneti and the battle between 220 of these ships and the Roman fleet commanded by Decimus Brutus. The contest presented peculiar difficulties, for the enemy's ships were built of oak in such solid fashion that the beaks of the Roman galleys made but slight impression upon them<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, they stood so much higher out of water than the Roman ships that their sterns overtopped even the towers erected on the decks of their opponents<sup>2</sup>. But as in the famous action between Gaius Duilius and the Carthaginians, Roman resourcefulness triumphed over adverse conditions. Since the enemy depended wholly upon their sailing powers<sup>3</sup>, the Romans made the sails the special object of their attack, cutting the ropes which held them up, and so bringing down sails and yards together.

There seems to be no doubt as to the result of the Romans' device, but exactly how it was accomplished is not perfectly clear from Caesar's language. He describes the manoeuvre as follows (3.14.5-7):

Una erat magno usui res praeparata a nostris, falces praeacutae insertae adfixaeque longioribus, non absimili forma muralium falcium. His cum funes qui antennae ad malos destinabant comprehensi adductique erant, navigio remis incitato praerumpabantur <prorumpabantur, β>. Quibus abscisis <praeacisis, β> antennae necessario concidebant; ut, cum omnis Gallicis navibus spes in velis armamentisque consisteret, his ereptis omnis usus navium uno tempore eriperetur.

It is clear enough from this description that certain ropes were cut and that when they were severed the sails fell to the deck. It seems altogether probable that the ropes in question were the halyards. That is the view of Dr. T. Rice Holmes, who in *Caesar's Conquest of Gaul*<sup>4</sup>, 91, renders the passage as follows:

Then with sharp hooks fixed to the ends of long poles, the Romans caught hold of the halyards and pulled them taut; the rowers plied their oars with might and main; and the sudden strain snapped the ropes. Down fell the yards. . . .

With this rendering I should agree, except that I believe that the ropes were cut rather than snapped by the sudden strain. This is indicated by Caesar's words, *quibus abscisis* (3.14.7), as well as by the sharpness of the *falces*, whether *praeacutae* be taken to mean 'very sharp' or 'with sharp edges'<sup>4</sup>. On pages 236-237 Dr. Holmes discusses the question in some detail. He makes it perfectly evident that it would have been impossible for the Romans to cut the 'ropes which bound the yards to the masts' if these were the

<sup>1</sup>Neque his nostrae rostro nocere poterant (tanta in his erat firmitudo), neque propter altitudinem facile telum adigebatur, et eadem de causa minus commode copulis continebantur (3.13.8).

<sup>2</sup>Turribus autem excitatis, tamen has altitudines puppium ex barbaris navibus superabant, ut neque ex inferiore loco satis commode tela adigi possent et missa ab Gallis gravius acciderent (3.14.4).

<sup>3</sup>cum omnis Gallicis navibus spes in velis armamentisque consisteret (3.14.7).

<sup>4</sup>See *The Classical Journal* 6.133 ff. That the second meaning is possible, although in my opinion not probable, is shown by such uses as Vergil, *Eclagues* 7.12 praetexit arundine ripas Mincius; *Aeneid* 6.5 litora curvae praetexunt puppes.